



U.S. Senate

Discussion Guide

Let's review

At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room.

And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so be prepared to hear a different point of view. Listen first, and focus on the facts.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

The "Table-it" Rule: If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

Let's begin

- **Take five minutes** to walk through the brief. Highlight the main point of each section and key statistics.
- Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two-three minute reaction** to the brief:
 - Introduce yourself, and share what "lens of care" did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, community, state, nation, global)?
 - What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the brief? What matters?

Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share with the Group During Your Discussion

- The Senate refers roughly [3,000 bills and resolutions](#) to committees during each two-year congressional session, but only about 500 of these are reported back to the full Senate.
- Senators have been directly elected by their state's voters since the passage of the [17th Amendment in 1913](#).
- The Senate has the [unique responsibilities](#) of conducting impeachment trials and providing advice and consent to confirm treaties and executive and judicial nominations.

Let's discuss

Below are 3 questions for the group to consider and discuss, or choose your own.

- **Community:** Because each state has only two senators, does this make these offices more removed from constituents? How does this affect constituents' influence on policy?
- **Local, State, or Federal Government:** What are some advantages and disadvantages to the structure of the Senate? Do you think the structure and process works?
- **Business:** The House of Representatives in particular has the power of the purse, and the Senate's role to review and polish House legislation. How may this affect economic policies and businesses?

Let's act

1. **Take it local. Talk to your neighbors** to identify how what happens in Congress affects your community. Identify opportunities to work with other community members in your area.
2. **Explore the impact of the Senate in your community.** Use [GovTrack](#) to find legislation that affects you, and see how your representatives have voted.
3. **Investigate community programs.** Find the legislative calendar for the Senate [here](#).
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions.** You can find contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#). Your state or municipality's websites will also have information to contact leaders. Try looking at the drop-down menu for a *Government* tab.
5. **Establish a relationship with your legislators.** It's easy to establish a relationship with your legislators. Start by introducing yourself. You can also learn to write to your representatives or set up a meeting with a legislator on [The Policy Circle website](#).
6. **Consider writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed on your stance on legislation or the operations of the Senate in your local paper.** Learn how on [The Policy Circle website](#).

Next Steps for Your Circle

- **Post a Recap:** Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present, and share planned actions from group members. Designate who will post a meeting recap on your circle page.
- **Decide your next meeting topic.** Want to discuss a related brief at your next meeting? Suggestions include:
 - [U.S. House of Representatives](#)
 - [The U.S. Constitution](#)
- **Dive Deeper into the issues.** If this is an area you would like to pursue further, consider taking possible steps to influence policy. The Policy Circle offers resources for [developing a message about your issue](#) and [organizing a petition](#) to amplify your voice and raise awareness. Don't miss our [latest events](#) that help you dive deeper on this issue and more.